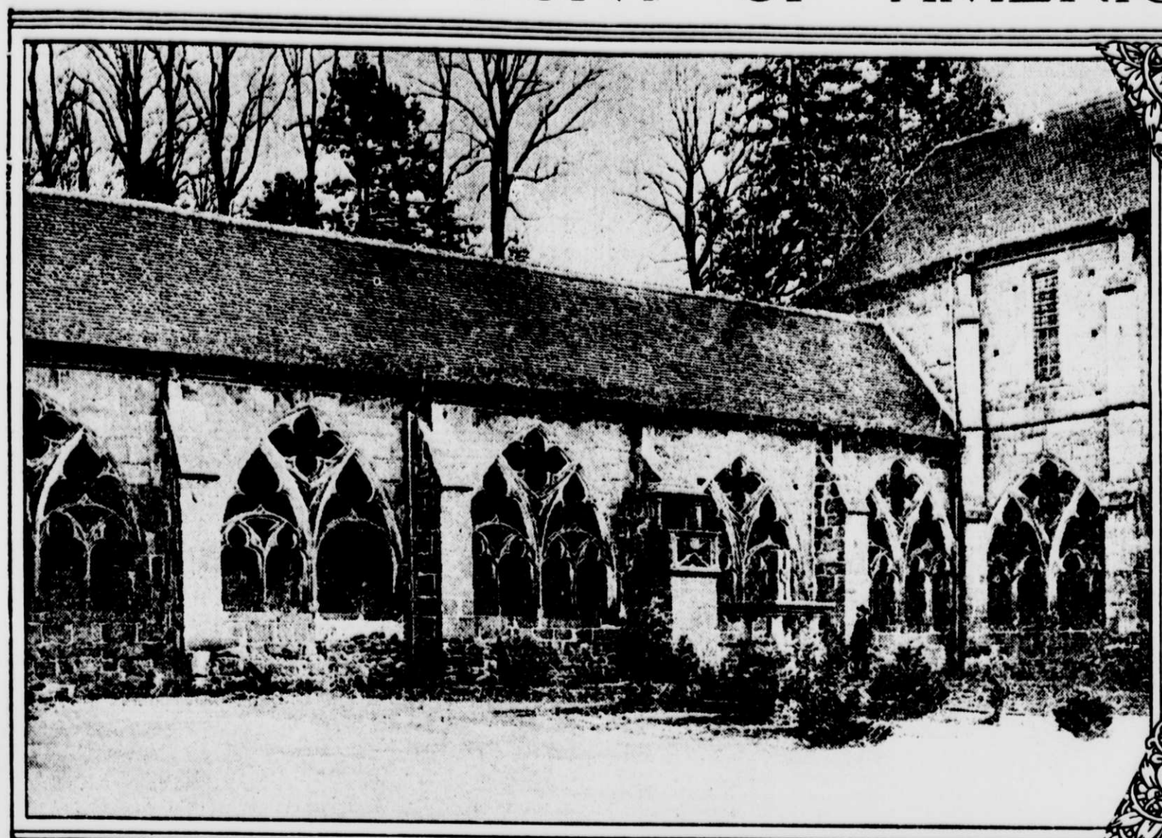
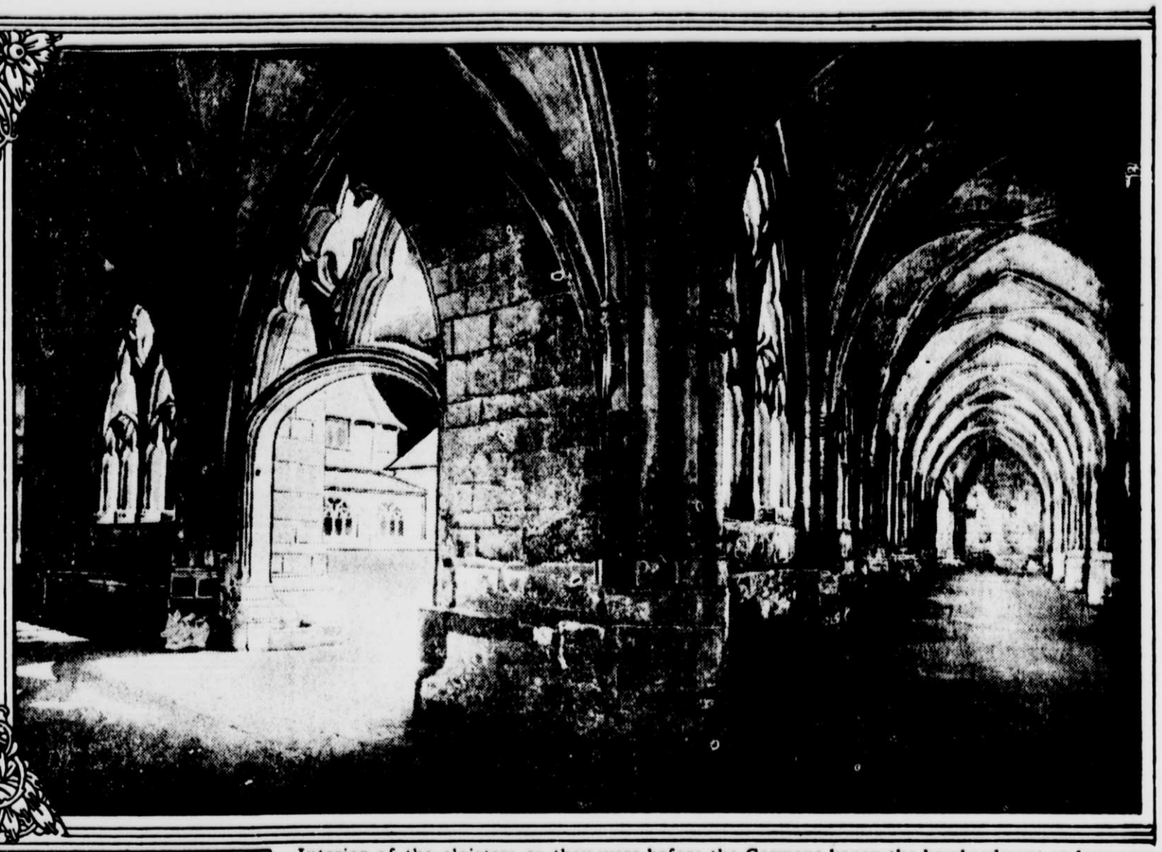
BAPTISMAL FONT OF AMERICA TARGET FOR SHELL FIRE



Cloisters of St. Die Cathedral, where in April, 1507, the name "America" was first bestowed



Interior of the cloisters as they were before the Germans began the bombardment at long range.

It Was at St. Die That the Canons of the Cathedral in 1507 First Gave This Country the Name Which It Bears

THE town of St. Die in France is being bombarded by German long range cannon which shoot over the Lorraine Mountains held by the French. Civilian visitors are safer just behind the trenches than at St. Die, although the men in the trenches look on it as a "town of the rear," where there are shops, restaurants and beds to sleep in.

The special interest of Americans in the bombardment lies in the fact that St. Die has been called the baptismal font of America. This name was given to the town in 1884 by Frank Mason, afterward United States Consul-General in Paris, in a monograph which enjoyed celebrity. The bombardment is causing great injury to the town without gaining obvious military results for the Germans.

On one Sunday afternoon, just as the children were returning from vespers, six great shells fell on the town and smashed two houses. On Monday morning fifteen shells fell, of which three damaged the cathedral. On Tuesday, between 8:30 A. M. and noon, forty-eight shells fell, six crashing into the cathedral or its cloisters. Again at 6 P. M. five more shells fell, well aimed by German mathematics. The cathedral cloister of St. Die bids fair to be a complete wreck.

Thus, without apparent reason the Germans are destroying the most venerable spot in France for Americans. St. Die lies in a valley, twenty miles in the interior, unimaginable as a point for observation of anything. Yet at long range from over the border the Germans are blowing up the cathedral cloisters where the word "America" was first pronounced and printed.

It was here that on June 4, 1911, in presence of the American Ambassador and a crowd of prominent Americans, the President of the French Republic unveiled a commemorative tablet. It was forever to honor the canons of St. Die Cathedral who on April 25, 1507, printed these words in a little book called "Cosmographiæ Introductio":

"There is a fourth quarter of the world which Americo Vespucci has discovered, and which for this reason we call America."

At the Chicago Exposition there was a special hall for St. Die. In it a copy of the little book—for which the collector Rahir had recently paid $550—was exposed in a glass case, open at page 30, where "America" first appears.

Cloister wall and commemorative tablet have now been destroyed. In this cloister, at the time of the discovery of America, learned men strolled, talking of geography and every science. The cathedral authorities ran an academy for full fledged scholars. In 1507 they bought a printing press and began to set up their "Cosmography"—a bringing up to date of old geography. Then they received a manuscript in French entitled "Quatre Navigations d'Amerique Vespuce." It came in handy.

"Here is up to date geography!" exclaimed the learnd Hylacomylus.

"A fourth quarter of the world to put in our 'Cosmography'!" rejoiced Matthias Ringmann.

Canon Jean Bazin translated it into plain Latin. And so the little book was printed—and America baptized in the cloister of St. Die!

When I was at St. Die no damage had been done to the cathedral. The photograph herewith shows the cloister as it will never be seen again. A year ago the Germans made a first attempt to get the range, but only smashed a suburb. Yet it was a close shave. Up to the very graveyard of the Little Church, adjoining the cathedral, the shells destroyed twenty-eight houses. It looked like an earthquake region. Then, on August 5, 1915, the first bombardment stopped. It began, again, the other day; and now they have the range of the cathedral.

The people of St. Die are not the only sufferers from the bombardment. American ambulances travel thither over the mountains from the front. Twelve miles beyond Richard Hall was killed by a German shell while transporting wounded over a highroad of the rear. Hall was a Dartmouth man from Ann Arbor, Mich. Close by Luke Doyle, a Yale man of Boston, was wounded while driving an ambulance.

One hears the cannonade continually. At night the eastern sky flashes with light fusees. The peasants whisper of great German transports; but the trench boys call it the "merry go round"—a periodical circular touring of masses of German infantry, to give the illusion of reenforcements. The French artillery pounds the German trenches. Night illuminations, patrols and forays alarm the Germans to their second line. One hears terrific tales of the results of the shelling.

In the devastated district of St. Die there is a family with two pretty girls of 15 and 17 who are continually on the spot where their house used to be hunting among the debris. Neighbors say that they are hunting the family hoard of gold, which had been hidden in a wall or under the hearth, or who knows where? Wall, hearth, everything is a mass of ruins. More likely, the girls are watching to see that nobody else finds the gold!

Well, each time that new German shells fall, do you think that the girls run? Not much, unless it be to run toward the explosion, in case their twelve-year-old brother has been helping them.

"They hope that new shells will clear the ground," says a contractor's man who is wrecking next door. "They hide behind their ruins and grub in the new craters as soon as they're made."

The peasants' tenacity in sticking to their ruins is astonishing. Close to the front, where a certain village is all but destroyed, a section of Alpine chasseurs occupied the cemetery in the outskirts. A German shell blew up the slab of a burial vault, while all around rained splinters of the "marmites." It was an unhoped for shelter.

A lieutenant and twelve men took refuge in it. They made the vault a kind of trench, strongly fortified. The next morning a soldier announced: "My lieutenant, a civilian, sent by the commandant."

It was an old peasant in his Sunday suit, black broadcloth, stained with earth. Mechanically he let drop the handles of a wheelbarrow that he had been pushing, a wheelbarrow loaded with a potato bag half full of something. The old peasant showed his permit and murmured: "I have come to bury my family, the Marescot family. I am the father."

The lieutenant remembered. The inhabitants had refused to quit the village, living in their cellars. So in the bombardment a mother and two daughters had been killed. The lieutenant was about to welcome the poor man when a squall of German shells fell. "Everybody in the holes!" he cried, and dragged the old peasant into the fortified burial vault along with the others. There he squatted in a corner, resigned, silent.

"Courage, Monsieur Marescot," said the lieutenant; "the shelling will not last long, and then the burial can take place in peace. I will send men for the bodies. Where are they?"

The old peasant looked up sad eyed. "They are here," he said simply.

"Here! Where? How?"

"They are in the bag," he answered. "It is all of them that was left!"

To cut short the painful situation the lieutenant said: "All right. I will have them buried."

The old peasant looked at him strangely.

"You can trust me," repeated the officer. "My chasseurs will dig a grave. You may have confidence."

"But," murmured the other, "I possess a family vault."

"Ah, good. All right. Where is it?"

"It is ——"

"Indicate it. Tell us."

"It is; that is to say ——"

"Where? Come, come!"

"My lieutenant," blurted out poor Father Marescot, sublime but humble hero; "my lieutenant; we are in it!"

What is the morality of bombardment?

One hears occasional stories of conscience and devotion to duty. Witness that English General in the Artois who scoured the country round to purchase the Aubigny wood from its owners because he was obliged to bombard it. "It worries me to destroy the property of innocent third parties," said the General.

Then there is the French artillery officer who offered to bombard his own chateau beyond Rheims because it was occupied by the staff of a German division—and because, as he argued, he knew the topography of the place better than anybody else. In that chateau were all his family treasures, all his dear remembrances, the riches of his heart. With his own hands, shell by shell, he shattered them. He was a hero because he offered to his country not only his life but his sentiments, his ideals.

Here, close to the firing line of Lorraine, one hears much of the cases of conscience of French officers with respect to bombarding towns as they advance in German held Lorraine.

Here now is an ideal deep rooted in French hearts, and they are torn between it and another, that of service to the patrie. Merely to do damage does not tempt them; they could bombard Metz ruinously any day, and yet they don't do it. They are twenty-three miles from Metz, with German armies and trenches in between; they cannot hope to take Metz by bombardment yet, and so they don't destroy its dwellings and churches at long range.

But what about real military objects? What about advancing? What about the towns of German held Lorraine in full front of the firing line? Lorraine is French to all French hearts. The old Lorraine families have been waiting forty years for the French to come and liberate them. How blow up their towns? They can't bring their hearts to do it!

Of all such cases of conscience the most touching I have heard concerns a humble little church in a Lorraine valley. The Germans are there, with the French on two sides. It is the story of the master gunner of Barkirch. Barkirch is just over the mountains from St. Die.

In a certain spot, then, hidden among branches, were three batteries of French "155 long" cannons. About a month ago the man who saw the first part of the adventure was sitting with the Captain when the Captain called out: "Send me the master gunner of the Third Battery."

The master gunner was a young fellow under 30, with blinking eyes behind far sighted spectacles. He looked worried.

"My friend," said the old officer, "I had designated you to fire this evening on the church of Barkirch over there. My calculations are ready. Here are the elements of the aim. But," he hesitated, "I have reflected."

"My Captain," murmured the young master gunner, growing pale, "a church? The church of Barkirch?"

"Yes, a church! But I have reflected. I exempt you. Another will fire and aim in your place. Go and report sick. No discussion. You are sick. Go to bed and drink tea. Enough. No more. You are sick, till further orders'"

The young master gunner walked off without a word, head bent, like a man condemned to death. And the old Captain whispered to the others: "I have stopped the drama. I may tell you, some day."

A month passed. Then the Captain told the story.

"Do you remember the artillery boy with spectacles whom I informed that he was sick?" he said to Georges d'Esparbes, curator of Fontainebleau. "He has just been killed. Now, read this!" (handing a pocket note book). "I must send it to his mother with the medals and citation."

Here are some extracts from the note book copied by M. d'Esparbes:

"Mother, I am on the edge of a precipice. God pity me! Mother, weep for me! All that you taught me when I was little of kindness and pardon toward our fellow men I have consented to unlearn in this war, holding ready some day later to convince your wisdom of the impossibility in which I found myself to have pity for the invaders.

"Mother, for thirteen months I have fired the cannon on human creatures—who would have thought that I with my spectacles would become the master gunner? For all this I can defend myself at the feet of the Lord; but now I am going to commit an abominable action, and, what fills my heart with dread, commit it squarely!

"Judge my despair! We have before us about five miles distant a little village with a little church that has become like a friend for me. My eyes repose on it, afar off. The little house of prayer has a poor little tower whose old bell sends us, faint and sweet, the double Angelus, signal by which I kneel, morning and evening. Now alas! bad news arrives. An entire German battalion has just occupied the church. So the church, in which is the presence of God, must be laid low, destroyed, by me—it is I who must ruin it!"

(Here a page torn out.)

"Mother, you know how good our Captain is. After giving me the terrible order—which, I must admit, is militarily his duty, the certain spared me. May God bless him! But how can I accept to throw the act upon another? I am the master gunner!

"The Germans let the Angelus still ring. The battalion is Bavarian, and many of them may be praying. I have arranged with my substitute. I shall aim the cannon; he will fire it. We shall await the evening Angelus. After the first shot I shall kneel.

"In this great disorder of my soul, sustain me, mamma. My good comrades of the battery have wives and children. I have only you; so in my great distress I call to 'mamma'. I am at your knees, mamma. As when I was little, lay your hands upon the forehead of your boy! Ah, not the boy of other days, but only of to-day—a soldier ——"

(End of the extracts. The remainder of the note book is torn and soiled with mud and blood.)

The old Captain sighed.

"I must send it to his mother," he said. "He aimed the piece with his own hands—despite my orders, which you all heard—and, at twilight, twenty shells were fired. My master gunner was kneeling in prayer. He remained there until daybreak. We saw him. We said to ourselves, 'If the morning Angelus rings it will mean that the church still stands—and we have missed an entire battalion of the enemy.' We looked at our watches. My Lieutenant whispered, 'The hour is past!' Just then the master gunner staggered to his cave room.

"It was a month ago," concluded the old Captain. "Last Thursday he was killed by a lone 210 shell. What could the Germans have been firing at?"

Ruins left by German shells in St. Die.

French revictualling party on the way to mountain trenches of Lorraine beyond St. Die.

MOTORING DOWN LIGHT OF GOD HIGHWAY INTO MEXICO

COLUMBUS discovered America; Villa discovered Columbus. Then I got a wandering bug one day and discovered something greater than Columbus, and that is the great highway that starts at Columbus, N. M., and winds its tortuous way for hundreds of miles right down through the heart of old Mexico.

In places this road is over a hundred feet wide, and in others it is so narrow that the rocks that line the walls of the rugged canyons scrape the paint from the machines. Then again there are places where the skid chains are necessary, and others where the motor skinners declare there is no bottom.

This great motor trail is destined to become one of the seventeen wonders of the world. "In what way?" you will ask. In answer I will quote the words of an old Mexican woman who has lost five sons and three daughters, carried away into captivity by the different tribes of guerrillas that infest the country.

We had pulled out to one side to let a couple of dozen motor trucks thunder by, their searchlights flashing and dancing, their mufflers shorn of baffle-plates, and an armed soldier sitting beside each driver, the driver with a big automatic dangling on his right hip and a wicked looking army rifle flopping against the iron support of his side.

I had been gleaning the history of this aged woman while the train was approaching, and when the last truck had roared by I turned to her and said:

"What do you think of those, granny?"

She hesitated to answer. Her claw-like hands kept opening and shutting while her sharp, beady eyes glanced around suspiciously. Finally she drew an old black piece of crape around her thin shoulders and hissed:

"They are bringing the light of God down into this accursed country."

Then, as if afraid of being censored for what she had said, she scuffed rapidly away in the direction of a sun baked adobe, and immediately I dubbed the road the "Light of God Highway."

"The Light of God Highway!" I wonder if it will live up to the high ideals that its name implies. I hope so. Yet at times I have some doubts, and here is just one incident out of many that come to my notice and make me sceptical.

I attended church at Columbus last Sunday and listened to a good sermon on "Man's Inhumanity to Man." After the services I hired a horse and took a ride along the road of Villa's retreat, some ten miles into old Mexico.

On this side of the line where they had the battle I came across all kinds of shocking sights, the relics of the fight, and at one place I found a dead Mexican that hadn't even been buried yet. There he lay, face down, one shoe on and one off. When I reported my find I was surprised to hear that nearly every one in Columbus knew that he was there and the sentiment seemed to be, "To hell with him. Let him rot."

Far be it from me to lose any sleep over this reprobate of a dead Mexican lying away out there among the dead horses, for I believe he got just what he had coming to him; still it seems to me it would be a more humane plan to kill 'em quick and bury 'em too.

For did you ever stop to think that even a Mexican greaser sometimes has a mother? And this boy's mother if living will some day be told how her boy, the boy that she nursed through the measles, the whooping cough, the mumps, the boy that she loved with all a mother's wild, forgiving love—she will hear how he died fighting under the flag of Gen. Villa and also how the Gringoes let his body lie unburied where he fell. Oh, she will have a soft spot in her heart for us—I don't think.

But the highway—I started out to tell about that and not to preach. Every twenty or thirty miles along this highway the khaki boys have a camp. Around these camps they have dug great ditches just as if they were going to put in a sewer system; but a soldier got confidential when I handed him a stogy and he told me they were for greasers. Now what earthly use a greaser would make of these ditches is beyond me and I am rather of the opinion that if I were a greaser I would give these ditches a wide berth and about the only way I would care to inspect them would be through a telescope.

When the boys first came down into Mexico all the natives would run and hide, but now they have found out that we don't intend to eat 'em alive and they have become more friendly, and they will hitch up the old burro and drive for miles just to see a mud-bird sail through the air, or a train of motor trucks rumble past.

The Light of God highway is a hard road to travel. I have ridden for hours with the wind blowing a gale and the dust cloud so thick that you could scarcely see the radiator. Many of the boys are going blind from this pelting, and they have all eaten so much sand that their joints grate when they walk.

The other morning while returning from the front I witnessed one of the most inspiring sights that a real Yankee can look at. We came suddenly around the point of a mountain on a horseshoe bend and there below us in plain view, their legs keeping time like a walking beam, came marching a regiment of Uncle Sam's finest. The early sunlight danced and glittered on their rifles, while a stiff morning breeze kept Old Glory stretched like a towline. Reaching back for a mile came a string of four mule teams pulling the regulation old covered army wagons with a few straggling rear guards at the end.

Of course you will say "That's nothing new. We saw that when we were boys." But did you ever see them out in a hostile country just when some nervous person had spread the report that a couple of thousand bandits were laying for you, and every minute you expected to hear a volley come crashing out of the mountain side? If you have not, hold your peace.

A short way further on toward the border we passed a full regiment of the finest cavalry that the world can produce, which gave us another thrill and left me too moved for words, but the rough old driver at my side broke the stillness with the following remark:

"That don't look like going out to me, it looks more like going in."

And so it does. And as far as I can find out by talking with poor but peace loving Mexicans it will be a blessing if we keep going in until every Mexican bandit has discovered that the Fox is a far safer instrument than the musket.